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Project: IP-227

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND REPORTS

Project Initiation Memorandum

30 August 1951

To: D/S

From: D/R

Subject: Slave Labor in the USSR

Statement of Project

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Origin: OPC (Case [REDACTED])

Problem: To furnish known intelligence with respect to Slave Labor camps in the North European section of the USSR.

Scope: The following types of intelligence are required:

- a. Specific location of the camps;
- b. Identity of organizations charged with guarding the camps;
- c. Living and working conditions among prisoners.

Form: Memorandum (Original and 2 copies).

Draft Due in D/R: As soon as convenient.

Responsible Division: D/S

Internal Coordination: As required.

Classification: Secret

Recommended Dissemination: Requester only.

Distribution: OAD-2; D/S-3; D/Z-3; D/G-1; D/A-1; D/I-1; D/H-1;
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D/R

26 September 1951

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Slave Labor in USSR (OPC Case [REDACTED])

The management of Soviet slave labor camps is the responsibility of the MVD, the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Chief Directorate of Camps (Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerie - GULAG) is the subdivision of the Ministry primarily concerned with the operation of the camps. The Chief Directorates of the MVD for railroad construction, for industrial construction, for hydraulic construction, for mining-metallurgical enterprises, and for highways probably also manage camps for their respective projects, but little is known concerning administrative interrelationships or the division of responsibility. Presumably only GULAG is charged with arresting and assigning prisoners, thus serving as a labor procurement office.

Although the legal definitions of various kinds of camps and colonies are known, the status of a particular unit cannot always be determined from available information. The geographical area under consideration (North European USSR), appears to include nearly all types of camps and institutions, including factory and agricultural colonies, corrective labor camps for mass work, and punitive and/or isolator camps, medical institutions and institutions for minors. The term camp properly used refers to administrative units composed of varying numbers of individual installations which may or may not be organized into subgroups.

In general, each camp seems to be assigned a primary project, plus subsidiary activities, apparently designed to make the camps as self-sustaining as possible.

Among the earliest camps in North European USSR were those on the Solovetski Islands (1), Novaya Zemlya (2), and Vaigach Island (3), which may now be closed, or used as isolator camps. There is information of relatively recent origin concerning the camps discussed below. Because the sources utilized do not provide a clear pattern of administrative organization and changes, the information available has been organized on a geographic basis.

I. Kotlas - Vorkuta Area

Centered around the city of Vorkuta (4) is a mining camp which has expanded greatly with the development of the Vorkuta-Inta coal basin. The camp also operates mechanical workshops, and is reported (1950) to

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be constructing a cement factory, as well as other buildings for the further expansion of the city of Vorkuta. The number of subcamps reported, e.g., OLP - independent camp point - #86, indicates a camp population of approximately 100,000, in addition to the growing civilian population.

Other camp installations in the same region are subordinate to Pechorlag.* Pechorlag, and Ukhta-Pechora are probably the same. The administrative center was at Abez (5), but moved to Kozhva (6) circa 1946. The camp is reportedly concerned with the double-tracking and extension of the rail line beyond Khalaeryu (7) to the Kara Sea. In this function at least, it appears to have replaced the eastern half of the older Sevzheldorlag (Northern Railroad Camp). The camp is also reported to be engaged in construction at Kozhva, which is to be expanded and replace Syktyvkar (8) as the administrative center of the Komi ASSR.

In the Ukhta (9) area approximately twenty camp sites are engaged in oil drilling, the production of oil drilling equipment, building oil pipelines, and related activities. There is also a penal unit for women and a children's home. This camp is probably the same as Ukhizhm, so that camp sites in Izhma (10) and Ust Izhma (11) areas would be subordinate to it. Ukhta itself may be subordinate to Pechorlag.

Veslyana (12) is probably the same as or subordinate to Ust Vym (13), on the Vym River. The sub-camps, approximately twenty in number scattered through the area, are engaged primarily in lumbering, and perhaps also in brickmaking and road-building.

Camps for timber production are indicated at an earlier date on many of the tributaries of the Pechora River. Kolva (14) and Ust Tsilma (15) may serve as centers for two such camps. A shipbuilding installation was reported near Troitsk Pechorsk (16), but its present status is unknown. There are probably units at Maryan Mar (17) attached to the port.

After the completion of the rail line to Vorkuta, Sevzheldorlag was reduced in size, and is now reported to work on maintenance of the rail line, lumbering, agriculture, roadbuilding and other construction. Its administrative center is reported to be Zheleznodorozhne, or Knazhpogost, which is the rail station for Zheleznodorozhne (18). This was the center for the western part of Sevzheldorlag.

* The suffix "lag" is a commonly used abbreviation for the Russian word for camp.

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During World War II prisoners were reported in camps named Yugorski on Point Sokoli at Khabarovo (19) and Anderma (20). Since they were assigned to build a rail line toward Vorkuta, and work on harbor construction, they were probably subordinate to Sevrhedorlag. They were reported abandoned in 1942, but may have reopened, or been shifted to Kara (21) with the postwar extension of the rail line mentioned above.

At Kotlas (22), there are an agricultural supply unit, a transient unit, a hospital unit, and a camp for women and children. This group came under the administration of Pechorlag in 1945.

West and north of Kotlas are the Severnyaya Dvina camp sites, which are engaged in agriculture, lumbering and woodworking. The administrative center is at Velsk (23).

There have also been references to camps along the Pinaga and Mezen (24) Rivers, which were at one time subordinate to the Kuloi system, engaged in lumbering, fishing and some construction.

II. Kargopol

Kargopol is in the southwestern part of Arkhangel oblast. The administrative center is reported at Yertsevo (25) on the Vologda-Arkhangel rail line, the main transfer camp at Nyandoma (26). This is primarily a forest camp, with some farming, fishing and construction, in addition. Subcamps have been reported at Kargopol (27), Konevo (28), and Vozhega (29). North of Kargopol is Oneglag. Plesetsk (30), reported to be the administrative center, is also mentioned in connection with Kargopol, so that the camps may have merged. Camp activities are essentially the same.

III. Arkhangelsk

Prisoners in the Arkhangelsk (31) city area are reportedly engaged in lumbering, construction, port work, and probably also in sawmills and fish canneries. To the west, at Molotovsk (32), convicts were used in the construction of a shipyard on Yagry Island and in a machinery plant.

IV. Karelo Finn SSR

The BBK (Baltic-Belomor Kanal) camp was established to build the canal. The administrative center was at Belomorsk (33). The camp may have been reorganized and renamed. Prisoners in the area are engaged in lumbering, farming, fishing, construction, and mining in Lake Onega

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area. Locations mentioned in the past include Medvezhegorsk (34), Petrozavodsk (35), and Pudozhe (36).

V. Kola Peninsula - Murmansk Oblast

There may be more than one camp in this area, since both Soroklag and Murmansk (37) camp have been mentioned. Prisoners are engaged in nickel and other mining near Kirovsk (38) in the Khibinsk mountains, at Monchegorsk (39), in the Ena River area, and probably also at Pechenga (40) (formerly Finnish Petsamo). Other activities include lumbering, fish processing, and various kinds of construction, such as the new power plants around Lake Imandra (41).

Camp installations vary in appearance. Those of a permanent nature tend to resemble other Soviet towns, particularly as the number of free personnel increases. Logging and road or railroad construction units are moved as the distance to the place of work requires. A fairly typical camp installation would consist of several wooden barracks surrounded by a single or double barbed wire fence. In this climate the barracks might be built partially underground. Each building holds approximately 150 persons. The number of guard towers equipped with machine-guns and search lights would depend on the length of the fence. Many camps have dogs which are used for guarding, and pursuing escapees.

The external guard of a camp usually consists of MVD personnel known as VOKHRA, or militarized guard, although guards are said to be Red Army personnel in some reports. A supervisory command from among the detainees themselves, usually common criminals, are charged with the maintenance of discipline and guarding of prisoners during work. A system of informers and organization for the maintenance of internal camp security seems to be universal, referred to in some reports as the "Third Section."

There are indications of a tendency toward improvement in the living conditions and treatment of prisoners, although conditions still appear to vary from camp to camp. The number of free settlers and contract workers seems to be increasing. "Special settlers," exiled but not imprisoned, and released prisoners are being used to establish permanent settlements wherever possible.

Contact with any sector of the population would be hazardous. Convicts would be under guard by the MVD or privileged criminals. The indigenous population would be suspicious and fearful of strangers because of the presence of convicts and the MVD throughout the area. The reward offered for the surrender of a fugitive was stated as 25 rubles

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about 1940, and is probably higher now. Former prisoners, "special settlers," and contract workers could be expected to surrender a stranger or fugitive through fear and/or desire for reward. Assistance might possibly be expected only from the indigenous population near the Finnish border. Guard stations were reported to be scattered throughout the open country in the late 1930's, but this may no longer be deemed necessary, since security has undoubtedly improved.

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Key to Map and Text

1. Solovetski islands
2. Novaya Zemlya
3. Vaigach Island
4. Vorkuta
5. Abas
6. Koshva, Pechora, Krasnopechorsk
7. Khalmeryu
8. Syktyvkar
9. Uhta, Chibyu
10. Ishma
11. Ust Izhma
12. Veslyana
13. Ust Vym
14. Kolva
15. Ust Tsilma
16. Troitsk Pechorsk
17. Maryn Mar
18. Khashpogost, Zheleznodorozhny
19. Khabarovo
20. Anderna
21. Kara
22. Kotlas
23. Velsk
24. Mezen
25. Yertsevo
26. Nyandomo
27. Kargopol
28. Konevo
29. Voshega
30. Plesetsk
31. Arkhangelsk
32. Molotovsk
33. Belomorsk
34. Medvezhegorsk
35. Petrozavodsk
36. Pudozhe
37. Murmansk
38. Kirovsk
39. Monchegorsk
40. Pechenga
41. Lake Imandra

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28 August 1951

MEMORANDUM FOR: CHIEF, REPORTS DIVISION, ORR

SUBJECT : Slave Labor in USSR

REFERENCE : Our Case [REDACTED] 25X1A

1. This office has a requirement for known intelligence of the following types with respect to Slave Labor camps in the North European section of the USSR:

a. Specific location of the camps.

b. Identity of organizations charged with guarding the camps.

25X1A c. Living and working conditions among prisoners.

2. [REDACTED] in your Economic Services Division is believed to have access to or knowledge of reports and material pertinent to the above.

3. Questions pertaining to this inquiry may be referred to [REDACTED] at Extension 3215.

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